

Testimony March 4, 2011

Good Evening. In light of Governor Malloy's stipulation to consolidate state agencies, many legislators must be posing the question, Why do some constituents think The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) should be a stand-alone agency? The disability of blindness is compounded by issues concerning visual loss. Professionals in the blindness field receive specialized training to teach students and newly blinded adults to read and write Braille, to travel safely and independently through instruction in using a white cane, and to learn home management and cooking techniques to function safely and independently within the home. Finally, adults who are looking for employment, or adults who develop vision loss while employed work with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to either secure employment or enable the person who is working with visual loss to remain employed.

How has The Board of Education and Services for the Blind affected my life? As a child, I learned to read and write Braille at the Oak Hill School for the blind which received funding for my education through The Board of Education and Services for the Blind. I later learned to travel safely and independently through instruction in using a white cane. Thanks to a recommendation of an orientation and mobility instructor at BESB, I trained with several seeing eye dogs at The Seeing Eye. I also graduated from college, and completed my master's degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. This degree was necessary in order to become employed as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. I have worked in Social Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling at The Board of Education and Services for the Blind for eleven years. Since I learned to cook and perform other home management skills, I enjoy living within my own home.

What is the future of The Board of Education and Services for the Blind? If this agency is consolidated within two agencies, children and adults who are blind will not be guaranteed training by professionals in the blindness field. Nor will there be communication between these professionals. This has been evidenced in other states where stand-alone agencies for the blind have been consolidated into other agencies. Therefore, I oppose the consolidation of The Board of Education and Services for the Blind. I thank you for the opportunity to present my concerns.

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